

To the Journal editor:

The Upper Peninsula is home to hundreds of nonprofits. From the U.P. Children's Museum in Marquette to Habitat for Humanity in Iron Mountain to Hospice in Sault St. Marie, nonprofits are committed to advancing the common good and meeting community needs. Nonprofits are the backbone of American society and provide vital services to millions.

The economic recession has dramatically increased demand for many of these services. More people need job training, food assistance, help finding health care or affordable housing. Simultaneously, donations have declined.

Nationwide, charitable giving by individuals, corporations and foundations dropped 3.6 percent, more than \$11 million, in 2009. As state and federal government face enormous fiscal challenges, many funding streams are being eliminated or significantly reduced. The simple truth is nonprofits are being asked to provide more with less funding.

As the November election approaches, candidates at local, state and federal levels must be aware of the critical roles nonprofits play. Too often, charities are overlooked policy is crafted by elected officials. The original version of health reform law included tax incentives to help small businesses provide health insurance to employees.

There were no similar nonprofit incentives, even though almost 10 percent of U.S. workers are employed by the nonprofit sector. This oversight was eventually corrected after outcry from the nonprofit community.

At the federal level, Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) introduced the promising *Nonprofit Sector and Community Solutions Act* (HR 5533). The bill would work to improve federal policies pertaining to nonprofits and directs federal agencies to collect and publish data on nonprofits and support research leading to smarter federal policy. It's a step in the right direction and deserves support.

Take a moment and think of a nonprofit that provides for you or your loved ones. Whether it be your local food pantry, arts council, youth camp, child care center, after school provider, or emergency shelter, consider making a small (or large) contribution. If you are unable to do so, perhaps you can volunteer your time.

Nonprofits are an essential part of your community. Working together, we can build a strong nonprofit sector and create more vibrant communities throughout the U.P.

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